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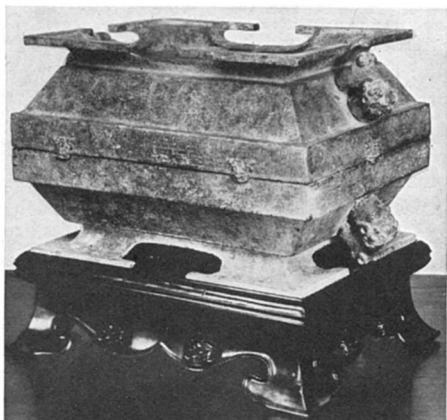
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CHINESE BRONZE FU IN THE LUCY MAUD BUCKINGHAM COLLECTION

THERE has been added recently to the Oriental Department a wonderfully artistic ancient specimen of bronze casting in the form of a covered vessel of the Chou Dynasty (1122-255 B. C.)†. It has a supreme quality which immediately stirs one's aesthetic emotions to a high degree of responsiveness, and a historical prestige which commands one's awe and respect. Furthermore, one could hardly pass it by without appreciative comment because of the beautiful blue-green patina that completely covers the surface and makes it a marked piece among other bronzes. It is a unique casting, a wonderful *objet d'art*.

Completely covering the outer surface is a delicate incised design forming an all-over continuous geometric pattern. The motif is a simple one but the clever way in which it was conceived and the dexterous way in which it was executed have produced an ensemble with variations that make the surface vibrate like that of a living thing. The detail (Figure 1) shows the skilful interlacing principle of the design and also the interesting way in which an oriental

can command an appearance of irregular balance in a perfectly regular pattern. By this means he subordinates the design; the surface decoration becomes a consistent whole and an integral part of the plane areas. The vessel does not exist for the design, nor does the design make the vessel, but the correlation of the one to the other makes a consistent whole which largely accounts for the superiority of this object. There is no accent, nor is there any monotony. The variation in the free-hand penciling of the pattern in the wax from which the permanent mould was made, and slight differences in the width of the enclosing marginal areas, preclude monotony in the whole. A slight change of motif occurs within the narrow border on the extreme outer edges of both cover and base (Figure 2). One half of this design is exactly like the principal one referred to above, but the other half is new, resembling a fishtailed banner.

The top and bottom spread outward from sloping sides and capped with vertical tops form the body of the vessel, which is rectangular in general form. In the center of each of the four spreading sides of the top and bottom an arched opening is cut, thus forming four

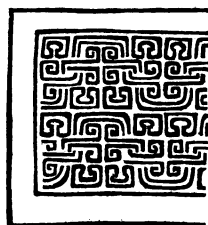


Fig.1

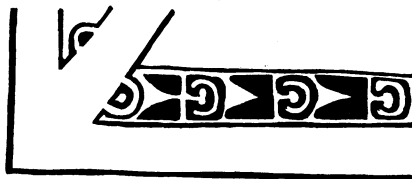


Fig.2

† Length over-all, 12"; width over-all, 8 3/8"; height over-all, 7 1/8"; inside at bottom, 8 14/16" x 5 15/16"

flat feet upon which the object rests. These arched openings are not cut at right angles with the side walls, as one would expect, but at an angle of thirty degrees, which about doubles the thickness of the edge at this point. The designer, however, wanted a still thicker edge, yet did not wish to increase the weight of the vessel, therefore he flattened out the thickened edge to a maximum width of nine-sixteenths of an inch, producing an astonishing result in the apparent solidity of the whole but adding little in actual weight. A similar treatment was adopted to produce an added thickness around the outer edges. All the walls caliper one-sixteenth of an inch but the narrow border around the outer edge measures five-sixteenths of an inch. This slight increase in thickness adds greatly to the stable enduring appearance of the bronze. By the use of these ingenious illusions the designer has given to this object an appearance of solidity, though its dominant characteristics are grace and lightness.

The Chou bronzes generally brought to one's attention are heavy, massive in form, and decorated with high relief. This one with its thin walls would seem to be an exception, as it is comparatively light, and its decoration is in low relief and delicate. The all-over incised pattern measures only one-sixty-fourth of an inch in depth and hardly varies the difference of a hair.

Two conventionalized animal heads are brazed to the sloping sides at each end, both on the cover and on the body of the vessel, thus making four handles. They are hollow with parts of the core still adhering to the inner surfaces. Probably they are elephants' heads, but the conventionalization has been carried so far that it is difficult to define them.

On the cover are six more animals' heads, two on each of the long sides and one in the center on each of the ends. These are a part of the original casting, not brazed on as are the



FISHERS OF SEA-WEED — IN SUMMER
EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS BY A. IACOVLEFF

handles, and serve as stops by which the cover is kept in place. The cover and body are alike with the exception of these bosses and divide the vessel into two equal parts. Thus evenly divided the vessel could be used on the altar as two receptacles, the scalloped spreading top of the cover becoming the stable spreading feet of the second receptacle. It is the double arrangement that adds greatly to the rarity of this sacrificial bronze. Single *fu* are recorded and illustrated and form one of the ten vessels placed upon the altar but this is perhaps the only double *fu* known. Dr. Berthold Laufer has given it the name *shuang fu*, and in his interesting monograph, *Archaic Chinese Bronzes in the Collection of Mr. Parish-Watson*, says that in origin the *fu* was a basket, used to hold boiled millet in State worship and that he proposes for this novel double *fu* the name *shuang fu* ("double basket").

The great rarity of the object, its age, its color, its technical excellence, and above all its art, make it a bronze to be admired by us as it must have been admired by generations past. Great care should be bestowed upon it that none of its present glory and beauty shall be lost, that it may be forever a peer among bronzes. M.